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# INTRIGUES

OF THE

# WAR

STARTLING REVELATIONS

HIDDEN UNTIL 1922

*IMPORTANT MILITARY  
SECRETS  
NOW DISCLOSED*

By Maj.-Gen. Sir FREDERICK MAURICE, K.C.M.G., C.B.

With Preface

By the MARQUIS OF CREWE, P.C., K.G., G.C.V.O.

Reprinted from the  
"Westminster Gazette"

6<sup>d.</sup>

With Portraits,  
Map, &c.

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*These articles by Major-General Sir Frederick Maurice on Mr. Lloyd George's Conduct of the War were written at the special request of the Editor of the "Westminster Gazette." They appeared in that journal during the month of June, 1922, and are now reprinted in this form to meet the wishes of many readers.*

*August, 1922.*



# INTRIGUES OF THE WAR

STARTLING REVELATIONS HIDDEN UNTIL 1922

*Important Military Secrets Now Disclosed*

By Major-General Sir Frederick Maurice

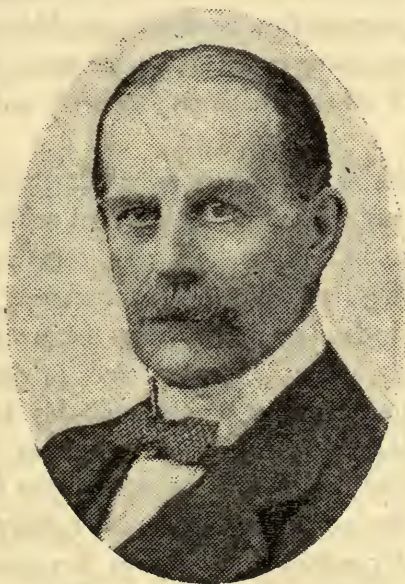
## A PREFACE

BY THE

MARQUIS OF CREWE, K.G.

MAJOR-GENERAL SIR FREDERICK MAURICE is an officer whose considered opinion on any military topic must claim the attention of the country. The son of a scientific soldier, one of the most capable

lieutenants of Lord himself seen much Tirah Expedition African Campaign, War he served Division of the tionary Force in Marne to Ypres of having won promotion was at the beginning brought in to quarters to be head Section of the subsequently was portant responsible of Military Operational General



MARQUIS OF CREWE, K.G.

Wolseley, he has service in the and in the South while in the Great with the Third original Expedition all the battles from the year 1914, and tion in the field, ning of 1915, General Head of the Operations General Staff, and entrusted with imilities as Director tions on the Im Staff from Decem-

ber, 1915 to April, 1918. He was thus thrown into close relations with all the frequenters of the Debatable Land which in war lies between the ascertained territories of the soldier and the politician, and which is at times the scene of sharp contests between the two. In modern history there are few exceptions

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to the existence of this dubious area, the most notable, of course, being that of Napoleon, who, from 1799 at any rate, became the sole and unquestioned arbiter both in policy and in the conduct of campaigns. But there can never have been greater difficulty in determining the limitations proper to each class of public servant than in the late war. The theatre was so vast, the countries engaged or interested were so numerous, that legitimate doubts may well persist until all the available facts are known, some fifty years hence, and even then they may not be resolved. The credit for particular successes, and the inmost responsibility for particular reverses, may never be finally adjudged. General Maurice, however, is not writing a history of the war, nor is he publishing, it is necessary to note, a political *brochure*. These chapters represent a soldier's appreciation of the military situation in 1917 and 1918, and of the dangers which he believes the country then underwent owing to the undue intervention of the Prime Minister in the region of actual strategy. Any comparison made between Mr. Lloyd George's methods and those of other statesmen is purely subsidiary to the main argument.

The writer would be the first to admit that the conduct of the war could not have been left entirely to sailors and soldiers. For instance, some move by sea or land in 1914 or 1915, repelling Italy or Rumania from joining the Allies, or completely alienating the sympathies of America, or driving Holland or Sweden into the arms of Germany, might have been strategically valuable, and perfect in design and execution. But as an obstacle to victory it would probably have been a ghastly blunder. General Maurice would also agree that the risk of an enterprise strategically doubtful in itself may sometimes fairly be undertaken by a Government if the adverse chances are rightly calculated. How far the Dardanelles Expedition falls within this category will remain a matter of controversy; but it will not be disputed that the political reactions consequent upon its success must have been tremendous, while it must be remembered that a weighty minority both of naval and of military opinion could be quoted in favour of the attempt; so failure to attain the objective must not be ascribed solely to the politicians.

General Maurice's indictment of the Prime Minister's action in 1917 and 1918 is framed on altogether different lines. It is not a



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question of a single misjudgment, such as might afflict any skilled commander at a given moment, but of a persistent encroachment on a forbidden domain; the charge is not that at times, to use Lord Salisbury's quoted phrase, he "put his money on the wrong horse," but that he presumed to set up as a backer of horses at all. It will not be disputed, I think, that Mr. Lloyd George has been generally regarded as cultivating the ambitions of an amateur strategist. Most of his civilian colleagues would agree on this—approvingly or disapprovingly—and military opinion would not differ. This is to judge not only by the caustic commentaries of Major-General Sir Charles Callwell, but also by the most recent utterances of the regretted officer who, in the later phases of the war, was reputed to stand first in the Prime Minister's estimation, the late Field-Marshal Sir Henry Wilson. Nor, perhaps, would the Prime Minister himself disavow the imputation. It is possible to argue, though surely not to prove, that amateur strategy has its advantages.

It being true, it may be urged, that a judge or arbitrator, not himself technically instructed, can arrive at a sounder decision in a complicated patent case, or an intricate commercial dispute, than would an expert in the subject at issue, may it not be equally true that when a struggle is being waged over half the world a gifted politician is able to take a broader and more comprehensive view of the strategic necessities than a General actually engaged on one of the fronts, who, in the familiar metaphor, fixes his eyes on some of the trees, but cannot see the forest as a whole? It can only be replied that the lessons of history do not confirm this contention. On the contrary, they show that after the ablest available commander has been selected, and the selection, if necessary, has been amended, a Minister or Cabinet can best assist the actual operations of war by exercising the negative virtue of self-effacement. The civil authority can render inestimable service by extending firm support to the commander at the front at critical moments, by tireless energy in supplying all the needs of the army, and by controlling or stimulating, as necessary, the temper of the nation.

The career of Lord Castlereagh offers an instructive illustration. He, too, has been termed an amateur strategist, and soon after he became Secretary for War and the Colonies, in 1805, he directed the abortive

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expedition to the Elbe in October of that year. Four years later public opinion saddled him, perhaps to excess, with the main responsibility for the failure of the descent on Walcheren, when the lure of Antwerp was almost as compelling as that of Constantinople in 1915. But, on the other hand, Castlereagh must always be gratefully remembered for his unswerving support of Wellington from the first days of landing in Portugal and during the whole conduct of the Peninsular War. Such were the ill-advised adventures and the beneficent activities of a strong-minded statesman of the early nineteenth century; and in criticising our Prime Minister of the twentieth Sir Frederick Maurice tries to strike a similar balance. He does not spare admiration of Mr. Lloyd George when he deems it deserved, as in speaking of his faith in victory, and of his vigour and courage in the crisis of March, 1918. But he considers that his Premiership was started with the erroneous assumption that the situation was almost desperate, that he instinctively distrusted military opinion, and liked being his own expert; and that the earlier instance of his political intervention, at the end of 1916, joined with the similar movements in France which centred round the person of General Nivelle, led to the disastrous postponement of victory for upwards of a year.

In the author's belief the Prime Minister was misled by "the general idea that he should be the modern Pitt," though without drawing a clear distinction between the elder and younger bearers of that famous name. It may perhaps be more likely that he conceived himself to be a new Gambetta, taking the lead at a moment of calamity, with the satisfactory difference that while the great Frenchman, when organising the national defence in 1871, was only able to prove that whatever France might lose she had not lost honour, the Englishman was privileged to turn impending defeat into certain and complete victory.

The later pages in this pamphlet formulate the second count in General Maurice's "J'accuse," comprising the charges conveyed in his notable letter to the Press, which evoked the Debates in the House of Commons of the 7th and 8th of May, 1918. Sir Frederick had stated that some assertions made by members of the Government in both Houses on the 9th of April, that the British forces in France were stronger than they had been a year before, were contrary to the fact;



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believing, as he now makes clear, that the statement was part of a plan to throw the whole responsibility for the temporary success of the German offensive on to the shoulders of Sir Douglas Haig, with the ultimate aim of removing him from the Command. The Debate of May 9th showed that not a few Members of the House of Commons, irrespective of party, were afraid that blame was being unfairly shifted on to the soldiers, and felt that the Government, while dwelling on General Maurice's admitted breach of discipline, had not succeeded in defending themselves. At any rate, the most ardent supporter of that administration must admit that Sir Frederick Maurice, in writing as he did, took his courage in both hands. As a reward for his services as D.M.O. he was specially promoted Major-General at the age of forty-five, and awarded the K.C.M.G. ; in April, 1918, he had been selected for a command in France. He was thus placing at hazard a most assured military career, with no conceivable advantage to himself, and he is justly indignant at being accused of taking part in a political intrigue.

On this episode, as on some of the questions raised in the earlier chapters, a civilian feels that any reply that can be made must be a military reply, if it is to carry real weight. General Maurice backs his statements by copious references to high authorities, and unless and until they can be refuted by others of equal credit, they must be regarded as holding the field. A recent tragedy has robbed us of what would have been as illuminating an opinion as any on this pamphlet. Whether Sir Henry Wilson would have concurred in most of the judgments it contains, with what modifications he would have accepted them, or how far he would have dissented from them as a whole, cannot now be known ; unless, indeed, he may have expressed to his friends an opinion on some of the articles as they appeared from time to time in the "*Westminster Gazette*."

In conclusion it must be remembered that the pamphlet represents a technical and historical verdict. It has no direct bearing on current controversies, and faithful admirers of the Prime Minister's foreign or domestic policy can read it without renunciation of allegiance, if they are so minded.

*Grewe*

# MR. LLOYD GEORGE'S CONDUCT OF THE WAR

By Major-General Sir FREDERICK MAURICE, K.C.M.G., C.B.

IT is customary for soldiers to damn politicians. While this is very natural, it has never seemed to me to be a very useful practice, for no soldier has yet invented an efficient substitute for the politician. It is more profitable, therefore, to try to make politicians better than to condemn them to perdition. As in this pamphlet I shall be very critical of some politicians, I wish to make it clear at once that my criticism will be no vague abuse, but an attempt to get at the truth for the guidance of ourselves and posterity.

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## I.

### *The Position at the Fall of Mr. Asquith's Administration.*

THE general opinion to-day, perhaps less strongly held than it was a year ago, but still very prevalent, is that Mr. Asquith's Administration had brought us at the end of 1916 to the verge of ruin, from which we were saved by Mr. Lloyd George's advent to power; that Mr. Asquith's methods of conducting the war were all wrong and Mr. Lloyd George's generally right. This opinion I hold to be erroneous, and so much relating to the conduct of the war has now been published in the countries of all the belligerents that it is possible at length to support my opinion with chapter and verse.

Mr. Lloyd George has repeatedly told us that he was called to office at a time when our fortunes were at a very low ebb. From the correspondence which passed between him and Mr. Asquith in December,



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1916,<sup>1</sup> we learn that he had a conversation with Mr. Asquith on December 1st, and that Mr. Asquith wrote to him on that day :—

"My dear Lloyd George,—I have now had time to reflect on our conversation this morning and to study your memorandum. Though I do not altogether share your dark estimate and forecast of the situation, actual and perspective, I am in complete agreement that we have reached a critical situation in the war."

### WRONG ASSUMPTIONS.

There is therefore no doubt that Mr. Lloyd George believed the situation to be desperate, and to require drastic changes in the methods of administration. It was upon that assumption that he made his plans. It was upon that assumption that his methods of conducting the war were based. There is no difficulty now in proving that the assumption had no foundation in fact. Where did Mr. Lloyd George get the information on which he based his "dark estimate and forecast of the situation, actual and perspective"? Not from the naval and military chiefs of the Alliance. On November 16th, 1916, Joffre held a conference at his headquarters at Chantilly to decide upon the plan of campaign for 1917. That conference was attended by Haig and Robertson, by the chiefs of the staffs of the Belgian and Italian armies, and by the chiefs of the Russian, Serbian, and Roumanian military missions. Of that conference Sir William Robertson says : "The exhausted condition of the German armies was not then as well known to us as it has since become, but we knew sufficient about it to realise the wisdom of taking full advantage of the successes gained in the Verdun and Somme campaigns, first by continuing to exert pressure on the Somme front as far as the winter season would permit, and secondly by preparing to attack the enemy early in 1917 with all the resources that could be made available, before he had time to recover from his difficulties. The Conference decided on a plan of this nature, but it was not carried out."<sup>2</sup>

Why? That I must leave to the next chapter. I am now concerned with Mr. Lloyd George's "dark estimate and forecast."

### ALLIED GENERALS AGREE,

The Allied Generals were thus agreed that the situation was good. What of the enemy generals? Their opinion was even more definite. It will, I think, be conceded that where Hindenburg, Ludendorff, Falkenhayn, and Tirpitz are agreed upon a German military problem there is little margin for doubt. Hindenburg says of the position at the end of 1916 : "There was no doubt that the relative strength of our



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own and of the enemies' force had changed still more to our disadvantage at the end of 1916 than had been the case at the beginning of the year. Roumania had joined our enemies, and despite her severe defeat she remained an important factor with which we had to reckon. The beaten army found refuge behind the Russian lines, where it gained time to recover and was certain of receiving a large measure of help from the Entente." Ludendorff is more definite. "We were completely exhausted on the Western front. . . . We now urgently needed a rest. The army had been fought to a standstill and was utterly worn out." "G.H.Q. had to bear in mind that the enemy's great superiority in men and material would be even more painfully felt in 1917 than in 1916. They had to face the danger that 'Somme Fighting' would soon break out at various points on our fronts, and that even our troops would not be able to withstand such attacks indefinitely, especially if the enemy gave us no time for rest and for the accumulation of material."<sup>4</sup>

Ludendorff's chief fear, then, was that the Chantilly plan should be carried out. Tirpitz says of the German situation at the end of 1916: "G.H.Q. doubted seriously whether we could hold out for another year (1917-1918)." "It is difficult to say whether if I had been the responsible statesman, knowing all the details then available, I should still have begun the campaign at the beginning of 1917. Our desperate position, of course, hardly left us any other way of escape from complete ruin." The "campaign" to which Tirpitz refers is unlimited U-boat warfare (Germany's last desperate coup), which brought America into the war. Falkenhayn was responsible for planning the battle of Verdun, and he resigned in the middle of the battle of the Somme, because of the failure of his plans. Naturally, therefore, he is on the defensive, and in his book paints the situation in the most favourable light. Yet the best he is able to say of the German position at the end of 1916 is: "The survey of the situation at that time revealed little that was inviting, as well as much that was serious. But there was no grounds for describing it as desperate." Lastly, Haig in February, 1917, gave an interview to certain French Pressmen, in which he described the prospects of victory in 1917 as rosy. This interview, expressing opinions so contrary to his own, so annoyed Mr. Lloyd George that he endeavoured to use it as a pretext for getting rid of Haig, but was opposed by the rest of the Cabinet.<sup>6</sup> There was then amongst the naval and military chiefs on both sides complete agreement that the position of the Allies, at the time when Mr. Lloyd George became Prime Minister, was very favourable, and the position of the Germans very serious.

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### MR. LLOYD GEORGE LACKS COURAGE.

Why did Mr. Lloyd George think otherwise? Because he hadn't the Duke of Wellington's "One o'clock in the morning courage," the courage which in the midst of troubles and difficulties sees also the enemy's troubles and difficulties. Unrivalled in a sudden crisis, he had not the temperament to endure a long drawn-out battle, and to give at its end just that extra push which means victory. He was swayed by sentiment. His sentimental affection for small nations caused him to exaggerate the effect of Roumania's defeat and to exaggerate still more the German forces which had brought that defeat about. His views about Roumania were unstable. On December 5th, 1916, he wrote to Mr. Asquith: "There has been delay, hesitation, lack of foresight and vision. I have endeavoured repeatedly to warn the Government of the dangers, both verbally and in written memoranda and letters, which I crave your leave to publish if my action is challenged, but I have failed to secure decisions or I have secured them when it was too late to avert the evils. **The latest illustration is our lamentable failure to give timely support to Roumania.**" Now early in August, 1916, Mr. Lloyd George went to Paris on behalf of Mr. Asquith's Government to negotiate with M. Briand the agreement which was to bring Roumania into the war. Then was the time for "forethought and vision," and to arrange for "timely support," but the agreement was concluded with Mr. Lloyd George's active assistance, and not until September, when it was too late to save Roumania from her blunders did he, in a Cabinet paper, which found its way somewhat strangely into the Atlantic Monthly correspondence, call upon the General Staff to give Roumania succour which he must have known could not have been given in time.

### THROWING AWAY VICTORY IN 1917.

His early aversion to seeking a decision on the Western Front was strengthened tenfold by the "bloody assaults of the Somme," and with his uncanny instinct for divining the trend of public opinion he sensed the effect of that terrible struggle. The Somme was the first great battle of the national armies of the Empire. It first brought the real horrors of war into the homes of the people, and we British hold curious views about war. We are prepared to stand and even to glory in any hammering in defence, but we shudder at any attack which does not bring immediate and visible results. So in his "dark estimate and forecast" Mr. Lloyd George had public opinion with him. Both were



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wrong. Public opinion needed to be led forward with courage to garner the fruits of the sacrifices of the Somme. **Believing there were no fruits Mr. Lloyd George threw away the chance of victory in 1917.**

- (1) Published in the "Atlantic Monthly," February, 1919.
- (2) "From Private to Field-Marshal." Sir W. Robertson, p. 285.
- (3) "Aus meinem Leben." Hindenburg, p. 220.
- (4) "My War Memories." Ludendorff. Vol. I., p. 307.
- (5) "General Headquarters and its Critical Decisions." Falkenhayne, p. 289.
- (6) "The Press and the General Staff." Lytton, p. 70.
- (7) "Mr. Lloyd George's Speech in Paris," November 13th, 1917.

## *II.—His Policy and Methods.*

IN December, 1915, Mr. Asquith had made a drastic change in the methods of conducting the war. He brought Sir William Robertson home from France, appointed him Chief of the Imperial General Staff, gave him increased powers, and made him directly responsible to the War Committee of the Cabinet for military operations.<sup>1</sup> The system thus established, together with the reconstruction of the General Staff, which Robertson undertook, brought about a great change in our fortunes. Under this system the respective functions of Ministers and of their military advisers were for the first time clearly defined, and under this system a situation which in December, 1915, after the failures in Gallipoli and Mesopotamia, was indeed gloomy, was changed to one which as I showed in my last chapter was, in December, 1916, full of promise. It took many months before decisions reached in London could become effective on the fighting fronts. Normally, it was six months before a measure passed in Parliament for increasing our man power could add to our military strength even in the nearest theatre of war, France. So the results of Mr. Asquith's system did not end with his term of office. The plans and preparations which brought Maude to Bagdad and wiped out the memory of Kut-el-Amara were all completed before Mr. Lloyd George became Prime Minister, and it was preparations similarly made which brought our fighting strength in France at the end of May, 1917, up to the highest point which it ever attained in the course of the war. **The vigorous impulse which Mr. Lloyd George appeared to give to military affairs in the spring of 1917 had, in fact, been arranged before he became Prime Minister.**

### HIS INSTINCTIVE DISTRUST.

On the false assumption that our affairs were at the end of 1916 going from bad to worse, Mr. Lloyd George, on becoming Prime Minister, proceeded to change the system. He had an instinctive



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distrust of military opinion. He regarded the great influence which Kitchener wielded during the first year of the war as one of the prime causes of our early failure, and, believing the situation after a year of Robertson's direction of military affairs to be dark, he would have liked to have curtailed the powers conferred on the Chief of the Imperial General Staff by Mr. Asquith, and to have got rid of Haig, but he did not feel strong enough at first to do either of these things. He therefore proceeded to gain his end in other ways. His end was greater control over the conduct of the war. He had been in communication with his friends in France on this subject, and had come to an agreement with them. "M. Painlevé, the forceful man of France, was in communication with Mr. Lloyd George, and both were disturbed about the direction of the war, particularly in the East. Their point of view was not dissimilar, inasmuch as both wanted to use political machinery to bring about a sort of military revolution in the way of a more vigorous direction of the war." The "sort of military revolution" took place in France first. Joffre was deposed on December 12th, 1916, and Nivelle reigned in his stead.

### **A COLD DOUCHE.**

Mr. Lloyd George's attempt to put the soldiers in their place followed quickly. Early in January, 1917, a Conference of the Allies was held in Rome, and at this Conference the British Prime Minister produced a plan for transferring from France to the Italian front 300 to 400 medium and heavy guns and several divisions with the object of knocking out Austria." This was the famous Laibach campaign, to which Mr. Lloyd George referred with pride in his speech in Paris on November 12th, 1917. Of this plan none of the Allied military chiefs had any inkling before it was produced at the Conference. Doubtless Mr. Lloyd George expected that it would be received in Italy with such enthusiasm as would sweep away the opposition which he anticipated from his own military advisers. But neither the French nor the Italian Ministers were accustomed to making military plans in that way, and his scheme was referred by the Conference to the soldiers for examination and report. This procedure came as a cold douche upon Mr. Lloyd George's zeal for the Italian enterprise, and on the return journey from Rome he was caught on the rebound by his French friends, who assured him that they had found in Nivelle the man who could win the war, and that Nivelle had a plan for breaking through on the Western front in a battle which after a short preliminary struggle would be decided one way

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or the other in forty-eight hours. This plan attracted Mr. Lloyd George as offering an alternative to another battle of the Somme. Nivelle was invited to London, where he met the War Cabinet on January 14th, and was promised the whole-hearted support of the British Government.<sup>11</sup> Two days later Cadorna presented his report on the Italian scheme, warmly approving Mr. Lloyd George's plan, and asking alternatively either for at least 300 medium and heavy guns or, to enable a more imposing enterprise to be undertaken, for at least eight Allied divisions.<sup>12</sup>

As we were then fully committed to the support of the Nivelle plan, the Laibach scheme was temporarily interred to rise again. Just what Cadorna thought when he learned that within a fortnight Mr. Lloyd George was backing another plan to that which he had proposed at Rome the Italian general does not say. So within the first six weeks of Mr. Lloyd George's administration the Chantilly plan had been thrown over, the Italian plan had been advocated and abandoned, and the Nivelle plan finally adopted, at a time when all discussions as to plans should long have ceased and preparations for the campaign of 1917 been well advanced. Such was "the more vigorous direction of the war."

### CONFERENCE SECRECY.

Having failed at Rome to impose his military ideas on the soldiers, Mr. Lloyd George began another attempt to achieve his object. On February 1st he met Major Bertier de Sauvigny, a French officer attached to my staff at the War Office as liaison officer, and told him that he had complete confidence in Nivelle, and thought that the British forces in France should be placed under his command. "Doubtless," he went on, "the prestige which Field-Marshal Haig enjoys with the British public and Army will make it difficult to subordinate him completely to the French command, but if the War Cabinet recognises that such a measure is indispensable it will not hesitate to give Field-Marshal Haig secret instructions in that sense."<sup>13</sup> Mr. Lloyd George accordingly arranged secretly for a Conference with the French Ministers at Calais at the end of February to discuss the placing of the British Army under Nivelle. It was given out to the British soldiers that the Conference was called to deal with transport difficulties which had arisen on the French railways, and it was attended for that purpose by Sir Eric Geddes, then in charge of railway transport at the War Office. Neither Haig nor Robertson had the least idea of what was afoot, and the proposal to give Nivelle control of the British Army was suddenly sprung upon them in the middle of the



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Conference and in the presence of our Allies, a situation as embarrassing to Nivelle, who was fully prepared for it, as it was to Haig, who had been kept in complete ignorance.<sup>14</sup>

### UNWORKABLE PROPOSAL.

The first French proposal was, from our point of view, unworkable, and had to be modified in a great hurry during the Conference. But a vital measure of this kind required the most careful consideration, and Mr. Lloyd George's method of conducting the business of the war made such consideration impossible. As the event proved, the plan was fundamentally defective, for it placed the Commander-in-Chief of one army, who was already fully occupied with the cares and responsibilities of his own front, in control of the Commander-in-Chief of another army. What was required was that one man, provided that the right man could be found, should be placed in general control of the whole front, and relieved of specific responsibility for any one part of it. This was a technical problem of military organisation, but Mr. Lloyd George was determined to be his own expert, and the result was failure. His general idea at this time appears to have been that he should be the modern Pitt. But his historical studies had not taken him sufficiently far to allow him to distinguish between the methods of the elder and the younger Pitt. He does not seem to have known that the strategical methods of William Pitt were disastrous, or that the methods of Chatham needed modification before they were applied to the modern nation in arms. His ruling passion was to get control, which might have worked if he had trusted his generals and they him. Things being as they were, he fell back on the method of trying to gain his ends behind their backs, and the experiences of Rome and Calais did not tend to harmony. In this atmosphere the fateful campaign of 1917 started.

(8) "From Private to Field-Marshal." Robertson, p. 237, *et seq.*

(9) "Mr. Lloyd George and the War." By an Independent Liberal.

(10 and 11) "La Vérité sur l'Offensive du Avril 16, 1917." Painlevé, p. 18.

(12) "La Guerra alla Fronte Italiana." Cadorna. Vol. II., pp. 36-38.

(13) M. Béranger's Report to the French Senate on the Offensive of 1917.

(14) "From Private to Field-Marshal." Robertson, p. 307.

### *III.—The Nivelle Affair and Its Sequel.*

THE first effect of the "sort of military revolution in the way of a more vigorous direction of the war," which Mr. Lloyd George and his French colleagues had brought about in December, 1916, was the escape of the Germans from their very difficult position on the Somme battlefield, an escape for which Haig was freely blamed at the time. Joffre and Haig had agreed at Chantilly in November, 1916, to press the Germans on



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the Somme during the winter, and to be ready to resume the offensive on a large scale early in February, 1917.

Unfortunately, Joffre said that the French Army, owing to its heavy losses, would only be able to take the chief part in one more great battle, and that thereafter the burden must fall more and more upon the British Army. He was quite right, as the events showed, but he was most unwise to give expression to his views. The consequence was that many French soldiers, who viewed with horror the idea of France standing at the end of the war in a secondary position to Great Britain and wanted their army to play a greater part in the campaign of 1917, threw in their lot with the politicians who desired more complete civilian control, and together they brought about Joffre's downfall.

The essence of Nivelle's plan was that the French Army should do more and the British Army less than had been proposed by Joffre. He said to the British War Cabinet on January 14th, 1917, "In proposing this plan of action the French Army, which had already made proportionately far larger sacrifices than any other of the Allied Armies, again assumes the largest share."<sup>15</sup>

### HIS DOMINANT IDEA.

It was this, together with the promise that the forthcoming battle should be short, sharp, and decisive, which commended Nivelle's plan to Mr. Lloyd George despite Haig's expression of opinion that a decision could not be gained without prolonged and severe preliminary fighting.<sup>16</sup> At this time Mr. Lloyd George's dominant idea was to spare the British Army the losses of another Somme, but, as the experience of war shows, the attempt to save losses by finding a way round or by shifting the burden on to other shoulders often results in greater losses. So it was in this case. To make the French Army stronger in the battle Nivelle required the British Army to take over a longer front during the winter and early spring. This had the result of preventing the British Army from maintaining the pressure on the Germans on the Somme battlefield to the extent which had been agreed upon by Haig and Joffre and of prolonging the necessary preparations. The campaign which Joffre had hoped to begin early in February actually began early in April. **A fateful delay of two months. This delay gave the Germans a respite they had not expected, and one of which they took the fullest advantage.** The German retreat to the Hindenburg Line began on the British front while the Calais Conference was actually in session, and was discovered and reported by General Gough.<sup>17</sup> Nivelle, fully

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occupied with his own concerns, and not in a position to appreciate fully the importance of events on the British front, did not believe in the retreat until the Germans had escaped," and then, though the data upon which his plan had been formed were no longer applicable, he obstinately adhered to his programme and failed disastrously.

### POLITICAL INTERVENTION.

But for the political intervention in the conduct of the war in France and Great Britain at the end of 1916, there is every reason to believe that the Germans would have been made to suffer as severely during their retreat in the spring of 1917 as they suffered when retreating over the same ground in September, 1918, the whole programme of the year's campaign would have been antedated by two months, the Germans would have been heavily punished before the untimely break in the weather of August, 1917, which involved us in the muddy horror of Passchendaele, we should have left the Germans no leisure to prepare the attack upon Italy, we might have prevented the complete collapse of the Russian Armies, which did not take place until July, 1917, and the victory in 1917 which Kitchener had prophesied might well have been realised." **Such were the fatal consequences of Mr. Lloyd George's mistaken assumption that the situation in December, 1916, was dark and could only be brightened by his personal direction of our strategy.**

The collapse of Nivelle's offensive had the most disastrous consequences in France. It was followed by a period of deep depression, both amongst the French public and in the Army. A series of mutinies broke out on the front which crippled the military power of France for many months, and Pétain, who had succeeded Nivelle, had to call upon Haig to keep the Germans occupied while he restored the *moral* of his troops. Soon after the collapse of the Russian Army became certain, while the unlimited "U"-boat warfare produced a crisis in our maritime communications. The situation had indeed become dark, and was relieved only by America's entry into the war. It was clear that America's military aid would not be considerable until the summer of 1918, and that till then the Entente Powers would have to face a period of danger. In these circumstances the Allied Commanders-in-Chief and Chiefs of Staff agreed in July, 1917, that it was necessary to reduce all commitments in secondary theatres of war to a minimum, and to strengthen the Western Front as much as possible. We could play our part in this programme by relieving British troops in Palestine, Meso-



## *The Intrigues of the War.*

potamia, and in Salonika by Indian troops, who, as experience had shown, could not be employed effectively on the Western Front, and by keeping our forces in France up to strength by means of drafts from home. I will leave to a later chapter the question of the secondary theatres of war, but must now say a word on the question of man-power, one of the prime concerns of the War Cabinet.

### DECLINING FIGHTING POWER.

Mr. Lloyd George had come into power to give a more energetic impulse to the conduct of the war, and it was expected that he would at once proceed to develop to the fullest extent our military resources. The contrary proved to be the case. I have already pointed out that it took about six months for a measure affecting man-power to produce rifles in the trenches in France. The Military Service Act of 1916 enabled our fighting strength in France to be brought to its highest point in June, 1917, and from then it steadily declined. As early as November, 1916, the General Staff had foreseen that this would be so, and Sir William Robertson had then asked for an extension of the age of military service.<sup>20</sup>

Owing to the change of Government in the following December nothing was done at the time, and the measures which Mr. Lloyd George took on becoming Prime Minister were wholly inadequate. "The difficulty of providing drafts in 1917 can be understood when I say that while we then had on the West Front a greater number of divisions than before, the fighting being prolonged and severe, **we took into the Army only 820,000 men, as against 1,200,000 in the previous year,**"<sup>21</sup> and the greater part of these 820,000 men were provided by measures taken before Mr. Lloyd George became Prime Minister.

### "TOO LATE!"

In the summer of 1917, when it had become obvious that it was necessary to provide more men for the danger period, the Army Council pressed the War Cabinet to extend the military age.<sup>22</sup> Nothing effective was done until January, 1918, when minor amendments to the Military Service Act of 1916 were introduced. These gave the Army 100,000 "A" men, a number absurdly less than the Army Council had asked for, and **not one of these men was trained in time to go into the trenches to meet the great German attack of March, 1918.** Sir Auckland Geddes, in introducing this measure, said that the Cabinet was satisfied that no extension of the age for military service was necessary.<sup>23</sup>



## *The Intrigues of the War.*

On April 9th, 1918, after the German attack had taken place, after it had become necessary to break up 25 per cent. of the British battalions in France to provide drafts for the remainder, and after we had suffered enormous losses which we need not have suffered had timely provision been made, the Prime Minister brought forward the proposals for increasing the age of service which Robertson had asked for in November, 1916. Determined to run the war in his own way, Mr. Lloyd George was alternately quarrelling with and disregarding his military advisers, and the result was that throughout 1917 he was too late. With strange prescience, he at the end of 1915 foretold the fatal error of his own conduct of the war. "Too late in moving here! Too late in arriving there! Too late in coming to a decision! Too late in starting with enterprises! Too late in preparing! In this war the footsteps of the Allied forces have been dogged by the mocking spectre of Too Late!"<sup>24</sup>

(15) "La vérité sur l'offensive du 16 avril 1917." Painlevé, p. 18.

(16) Ibid., p. 19.

(17) "From Private to Field-Marshal." Robertson, p. 308.

(18) "La vérité sur l'offensive du 16 avril 1917." Painlevé, p. 23.

(19) "From Private to Field-Marshal." Robertson, p. 264.

(20) Ibid., p. 303.

(21) Ibid., p. 301.

(22) "Experiences of a Dug-Out." Callwell.

(23) House of Commons. January, 14th, 1918.

(24) House of Commons, December 20th, 1915.

## *IV.—The Versailles Council.*

FOR a brief moment after the failure of Nivelle's attack, Mr. Lloyd George was in agreement with his soldiers. Haig and Robertson were clear that if the Germans were given a respite they would be free to crush the Russian armies which Kerensky was endeavouring to rally for an offensive, or to attack Italy, and early in May, 1917, at a conference in Paris, the Prime Minister stoutly pressed the French to continue the fight on the Western front. But very soon after this conference the French army became incapable for a time of taking an equal share in the struggle, and Mr. Lloyd George again changed his mind. Fresh plans followed one upon the other. It is not my purpose to enlarge upon the evils which accompany the tendency to change from one plan to another, at bewilderingly short intervals and without sufficient military reason, beyond observing that it has an unsettling effect on the troops, and monopolises much of the time of commanders and their staffs which ought to be given to other matters. At a guess I would say that in 1917 at least

## *The Intrigues of the War.*

twenty per cent. of the time of the General Staff at the War Office was occupied in explaining either verbally or in writing that the alternative projects put forward were either strategically unsound or were wholly impracticable.<sup>25</sup>

### **"SO EASY!"**

The proposal to send troops to Italy in order to crush Austria reappeared, and a new plan for a landing at Alexandretta in rear of the Turkish army in Palestine was proposed.<sup>26</sup> It is so easy to pick up a pin from a map and to move it from one continent to another; it is so difficult to foresee what the enemy may do while the troops, who cannot fight when they are on the move, are getting to their places. I have said that Mr. Lloyd George, full of courage when his blood was hot in a crisis, lacked "one o'clock in the morning courage." Full of imagination of a kind, he lacked that particular kind of imagination which is needed to guess what is happening or may happen "on the other side of the hill." Great on a small-scale map, which showed the world with the surface of a billiard ball, he examined large-scale maps, which displayed the features of the ground and those obstacles of terrain which mean so much to military movement, with equal interest both upside down and right way up. None of this would have mattered in the least had he been satisfied to choose his expert and to rely upon that expert's advice in technical matters, but it was the very devil when he sought to be his own expert.

### **RHETORICAL ARGUMENT.**

When all hope of wringing success from Nivelle's plans disappeared, Mr. Lloyd George's temporary devotion to the Western front disappeared too. It is notorious that he was bitterly opposed to Haig's campaign in Flanders, which culminated in the battle of Passchendaele. But the risks of leaving the Germans free to attack the French, while Petain was in need of breathing space in order to restore the fighting spirit of his army, were so obvious that Mr. Lloyd George's plans for finding a way round either through Laibach or Constantinople were overruled. Evidently he felt that deeply, for in Paris, on November 12th, 1917, he said: "But when the military power of Russia collapsed in March, what took place? If Europe had been treated as one battlefield you might have thought that when it was clear that a great army which was operating on one flank could not come up in time, or even come into





FIELD-MARSHAL EARL HAIG, O.M.



FIELD-MARSHAL SIR W. ROBERTSON,  
G.C.B.



FIELD-MARSHAL FOCH, O.M., G.C.B.



MARSHAL PÉTAIN



GENERAL NIVELLE





The late FIELD-MARSHAL SIR  
H. WILSON



MAJOR-GENERAL SIR F. MAURICE  
K.C.M.G.



The Rt. Hon. H. H. ASQUITH, K.C., M.P.



The Rt. Hon. D. LLOYD GEORGE, O.M., M.P.

“CHEERIO !”



THE MAN WHO WON THE WAR.



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action at all, there would have been a change in strategy. Not in the least." His plans had been thwarted, and he pointed with accusing finger to the consequences. "Look at the horrible slaughter of Passchendaele. Look at the disaster on the Italian front." He was able to say to those who opposed him, "If only my advice had been followed, and we had sent troops to fight in the mountains of Italy, instead of in the mud of Flanders." The opportunities for rhetorical argument were unlimited, and the soldiers' "Think what might have happened if we had weakened the Western front at this time, when the French Army is temporarily *hors de combat*," was in the face of apparent failure an ineffective reply. So early in November Mr. Lloyd George saw his way clear to a further step towards obtaining control, and at the height of the crisis on the Italian front he rushed off to Rapallo, and there instituted the Supreme War Council.

It has been generally assumed that this Council was created in the teeth of bitter opposition from the soldiers. This is pure fiction. It had long been felt that some such body was needed for the better co-ordination of Allied policy and plans. I was the General Staff Officer referred to by Mr. Lloyd George as having assisted him in drafting the constitution of the Council," and I was able to do the work very quickly, for some such plan had been considered for months previously. "It was proposed," said Mr. Lloyd George, speaking in the House on November 19th, "in July this year, at a meeting of the Commanders-in-Chief. I forget whether all were there, but the Chiefs of Staff were. At any rate Sir William Robertson, General Pershing, General Cadorna, and General Foch were there. They recommended, as a means of dealing with the situation, the setting up of an inter-Allied Council." Why was the Council not set up before? The soldiers wanted it, the French Government was eager to have it. Because Mr. Lloyd George wanted a particular form of Council, and not until Passchendaele had brought discredit on the soldiers' strategy and credit upon his strategical vision and foresight was he able to get his way. He had found it hard to get his way when his strategy was opposed by Haig and Robertson, so he bethought him of an old political maxim. "Divide et impera," said the Roman, and he wanted to rule. He therefore insisted that the British military representative on the Versailles Council should be entirely independent of the Chief of the Imperial General Staff, and should give his advice directly to the War Cabinet. With two advisers, Mr. Lloyd George did not need to make a large draft upon his skill in order to play off one against the other, and so get his own way.

### POLITICAL CONTROL.

It seems clear that, in setting up the Council, the real object of Ministers was not so much to provide effective unity of military command as to acquire for themselves a greater control over the military chiefs. That there was no intention of unifying the command by the appointment of an Allied Commander-in-Chief seems equally evident, not only from the constitution of the Council itself, but also from the fact that a few days later the Prime Minister stated in the House of Commons<sup>28</sup> that he was "utterly opposed" to the appointment of a Generalissimo, as it "would produce real friction and might create prejudice not merely between the armies but between the nations and Government."<sup>29</sup> The Versailles Council was an admirable institution, and it did excellent work. It systematised the business and methods of the frequent conferences of Allied Ministers, and provided a much-needed clearing house for the affairs of the Entente Powers. It never was and never could be an effective means of exercising command over the Allied forces. That was a problem which, at the end of 1917, remained to be solved, and with Germany rapidly transferring troops from her Eastern to her Western front it became increasingly urgent that it should be solved. The story of its solution I must leave to another chapter.

### THE "UNRULY SOLDIERY."

Tacked on to the constitution of the Versailles Council was the purely British condition which supplied the British Government with a new and independent adviser, and more particularly supplied Mr. Lloyd George with the bit for which he had long been seeking, the bit which he hoped would enable him to control the unruly soldiery which would not accept his views on strategy at the value placed upon them by himself and his friends. There is much to be said for a dictatorship in time of war, provided that the dictator has the knowledge to direct both strategy and policy, or knows how to use his experts, and trusts them. There is nothing to be said for a system under which a Prime Minister and his experts seek to win a war by different methods. Circumstances prevented Mr. Lloyd George from working openly for his end. The prestige which Field-Marshal Haig enjoyed with the British public and Army<sup>30</sup> made this difficult, and he had to resort to the manoeuvres of Calais and Rapallo. But, as he gradually saw his way more clearly, Mr. Lloyd George took less and less pains to conceal his distrust of Haig and Robertson, "You must either succour or sack," said to him one of



his colleagues given to epigram and alliteration. He would not succour and he dared not sack, and with this deadweight of disagreement as to the higher direction of the war on his shoulders he drifted into the dangers of the spring of 1918.

(25) "From Private to Field-Marshal." Robertson, p. 319.

(26) *Ibid.*, p. 315.

(27) House of Commons. November 19th, 1917.

(28) *Ibid.*

(29) "From Private to Field-Marshal." Robertson, p. 320.

(30) Mr. Lloyd George's statement to Major Berthier.—Béranger report.

### *V.—Troops Kept in Palestine.*

IN January, 1918, the paramount fact in the military situation was that the Germans were bringing divisions from the Russian Front into France and Belgium as fast as their railways could transport the troops. To meet this situation the British General Staff continued to press the Government to give effect to the recommendations made by the Allied Commanders-in-Chief and Chiefs-of-Staff in Paris, including Foch, in July, 1917, that we should act defensively in the secondary theatres of war and bring back as many British troops as possible to France. We had at the end of 1917 not less than 1,200,000 men in distant parts, and a large number of British troops could have been sent from the East to help Haig to meet the expected German attack without the smallest risk to our Oriental interests.<sup>21</sup> But Mr. Lloyd George was, after Passchendaele, more than ever convinced that the barrier in the West was impenetrable alike by ourselves and by the Germans, and was therefore opposed to sending more men to France. He foresaw a period of anxious defensive struggle on the Western Front, and was eager for political reasons to compensate for this by success in the East. Therefore he urged that Allenby should attack and drive the Turks out of Palestine, and forbade the transfer to Haig of any of the 100,000 British troops in that theatre of war. There was thus a direct conflict of opinion between the Prime Minister and the Allied soldiers.<sup>22</sup>

#### OPPOSED TO GENERALISSIMO.

Was the barrier in the West impenetrable? Was the Western Front safe? These were the questions that went to the root of the matter, and Mr. Lloyd George believed he could answer them. The Germans would certainly be able to attack in the early spring, and it was to be expected that while threatening various parts of the Allied Front they would make a great effort against one part, but they would not have

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any marked superiority of numbers on the whole front, and it was clear that the right answer for the defence was it should be under one authority, able to decide at once as to the point of danger, and controlling ample reserves. It was now evident to the statesmen that the Versailles Council was not such an authority. Something more was necessary. What form should this something more take? The idea still very prevalent that Mr. Lloyd George had to struggle for unity of command against a narrow-minded soldiery is absurdly wide of the truth. The soldiers wanted a workable scheme of military command, but Mr. Lloyd George had expressed himself in the strongest terms as opposed to the creation of a generalissimo ; therefore some other solution had to be found.<sup>33</sup> The Versailles Council met at the end of January, 1918, to find this solution and to agree upon the main lines of the campaign for 1918. At this meeting of the Council Mr. Lloyd George propounded his Palestine plan, which was opposed by M. Clemenceau. Eventually it was agreed as a compromise that Allenby should attack, provided that no reinforcements were diverted from the Western Front to Palestine. Robertson protested, as he wanted to bring troops from Palestine to France, but was overruled. Then came the question of command. After a prolonged discussion Mr. Lloyd George's proposal to form a strategic reserve for the Western Front, and to place this reserve under an Executive Committee of the Versailles Council composed of the military representatives at Versailles of the Allies, with General Foch as chairman, was accepted, and he came home satisfied that the Western Front was safe. Robertson again protested, after putting forward an alternative plan, and was removed from his position as Chief of the Imperial General Staff.

### NO STRATEGIC RESERVE.

Now, in fact, the strategic reserve was never formed, and the Executive Committee never exercised any real functions, for reasons which I will explain. It is upon this hangs the defence of Mr. Lloyd George's policy. If, argue his friends, the Committee had been allowed to work and the reserve had been formed, the disaster to the Fifth Army would never have occurred, but the Committee was torpedoed by Pétain, Haig, and Robertson. What happened? The Committee met and called upon the Commanders-in-Chief to provide contingents for the strategic reserve. Haig was asked to supply eight divisions, and replied on March 3rd that he could not furnish them. The British Commander-in-Chief was extraordinarily well served by his intelligence department,



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and by the end of February he had come to the conclusion that the main German attack would be made against his Third and Fifth Armies.<sup>54</sup> Owing to the political pressure which the French Government had brought to bear upon the British Government he had been compelled to make a large extension of the front of the Fifth Army in relief of French troops. He had had to send five divisions to Italy in November, and had received none in return, nor had the losses of Passchendaele been made good. **In default of drafts from home he had had to break up 25 per cent. of his British infantry battalions in order to find men for the remainder.** In these circumstances he could not garnish his whole front to meet the coming attack, and he decided that he could best take risks on the front of the Fifth Army, which was nearest to the French and had more room to give ground than had the armies further north.<sup>55</sup> Had he furnished the reserves which the Executive Committee asked for, these reserves must in the main have come from the troops which in the event supported the Third Army in the battle. Now Ludendorff tells us that his plan was to break through north of the Somme—that is, on the Third Army front—and to use the Somme to hold off the French while he rolled up the British Army. It was only when he found that he was not succeeding as he had hoped north of the Somme that he agreed to let the Crown Prince follow up south of the river against the Fifth Army what seemed to be an easily won success, towards Amiens.<sup>56</sup> **If Haig had let the reserves go Ludendorff's plan would almost certainly have succeeded, for the Executive Committee at Versailles, not in as close touch with events as were the Commanders-in-Chief, after such debate as always takes place in committee, after satisfying itself that the main attack was really against Haig, a fact of which Petain was still doubtful on the sixth day of the battle, would only have released the reserves much later than did Haig, and they could not have arrived in time to save the Third Army, which would have been involved in the disaster of the Fifth Army, with consequences far more serious.** Be it remembered that the Committee controlled only the reserves, and left the Commanders-in-Chief entirely responsible for their armies. The Versailles decision did not give Foch any voice whatever in the disposition of the troops on the front. Had Haig sent the reserves away, he would have endangered his army, the safety of the Channel ports, and the whole Allied cause. His refusal was completely justified, and was upheld at an Allied Conference held in London on March 14th, which in effect put an end to the Executive Committee on the eve of the battle.<sup>57</sup>

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### SIMILAR BLUNDER.

Mr. Lloyd George repeated at Versailles the blunder he had made at Calais eleven months before. His object was to obtain unity of direction, **but he desired to do this without sacrificing his own influence upon the strategy of the war.** He therefore, knowing how eager the French were to take any step which would lead to control by themselves of the operations on the Western Front, forced through a plan which his experience of conferences led him to think would be accepted, without giving Haig and Robertson time to work out the military effect of the proposal. This plan divided the forces in France still more than they had been divided before. A portion was left under the control of the Commanders-in-Chief, another portion was placed under a committee, and command by committee has always failed in war. In this instance the Committee, being composed of representatives of different nations, was doubly defective. It proceeded to bargain. The French would produce so many divisions for the reserve, the Italians so many, if the British provided so many more. The right way to approach the problem was to regard the front as a whole, without consideration of the nationality of the troops on the front, and to decide what parts of the front could afford to give up reserves for the benefits of those parts which might need support, but to such a committee this was impossible. These matters and the more technical problems of the rate at which reserves could be delivered at the front were beyond Mr. Lloyd George's competence, but he gave the soldiers no chance of considering them before the Committee was formed. He succeeded, however, in preserving the position he had won at Rapallo. The British representative on the Committee was to be entirely free and independent of the British Commander-in-Chief and the British Chief of the General Staff, and was to have power to issue orders to the British portion of the reserve. **The Prime Minister was thus sure of being able, if need were, to play off one soldier against another and preserve his own influence.** A curious form of unity. Divided forces and divided command.

### ABSURD INTRIGUE RUMOURS.

The absurd charge has been made that Haig and Pétain engaged in an intrigue to prevent Foch from controlling the reserves. In fact, Haig, on studying the effect of the Versailles decisions, found them to be unworkable, and at once proceeded to concert with Pétain arrangements for mutual support. Foch was fully informed of the results of the conferences which ensued between the two Commanders-in-Chief, and his representatives were present at the more detailed



discussions between the two Staffs. It was on Haig's initiative that the Conference at Doullens, which placed Foch in control, was held; it was he, not Mr. Lloyd George, who supported enthusiastically the creation of a generalissimo, and it was he who proposed that Foch should be nominated.<sup>33</sup> With that nomination, unity of command on military instead of political principles was established, and with it passed away Mr. Lloyd George's influence on strategy. The German attack was stayed, but only after we had suffered losses more terrible than we endured in any corresponding period of the war, and, after the blow had fallen, all those measures were taken which Mr. Lloyd George had resolutely opposed throughout the summer and autumn of 1917. It is, of course, true that Mr. Lloyd George accepted Foch's appointment when it was notified to him, and as long as Foch was sending troops to help us the generalissimo naturally enough received the fullest support from our Government; but on the first occasion on which the process was reversed, when Foch called upon Haig to supply eight British divisions to help him make the counter-attack of July 18th, 1918, which resulted in the victory of the second battle of the Marne and turned the tide of war in our favour, the Government threw the entire responsibility for weakening the British front upon Haig, who insisted that, having appointed Foch generalissimo, it was our duty to support him in his plans. In a small book which I wrote in 1919 I applauded that decision as a mark of Mr. Lloyd George's courage and readiness to take risks. I have since learned that the courage was Haig's alone." The initiative, both in the appointment of Foch and in supporting him when appointed, came from the British Commander-in-Chief, not from the British Prime Minister.

(31) "From Private to Field-Marshal." Robertson, p. 324.

(32) Ibid., p. 317.

(33) House of Commons. November 19th, 1917.

(34) Sir Douglas Haig's Despatches, p. 182.

(35) Ibid., p. 183.

(36) "My War Memories." Ludendorff. Vol. II., p. 590.

(37) "Comment finit la Guerre." General Mangin, p. 167.

(38) "Lord Milner's Report on the Doullens Conference." "New Statesman," April 23rd, 1921.

(39) "The Last Four Months." Maurice, p. 70.

## *VI.—Plan to Remove Haig.*

WHEN the crisis came Mr. Lloyd George was splendid. While others wavered and began to give up hope, he never lost his faith in victory, and with rare energy he repaired in a few weeks all the errors of omission of the previous year. His vigour and courage in the dark days of the

## *The Intrigues of the War.*

spring of 1918 won for him the admiration and devotion of his colleagues, of whom few knew the full story of the events which I have narrated in previous chapters.

We all of us admire the man who risks his life to save the occupants of the house which he has set on fire, and our admiration is the greater when we do not know the cause of the conflagration. It is only on reflection that we realise that the man who takes precautions to prevent fire is the more useful citizen. The sole precaution which had been taken to meet the German attack was the establishment of the futile Executive Committee, agreed to by M. Clemenceau because of Mr. Lloyd George's assurance that the British Government would go no further towards unity of command, but after the event everything that was possible was done.

In January, 1918, the Government had decided that an additional 100,000 men would meet the needs of the Army. In April 400,000 more were provided, and so the 500,000 men whom Robertson had asked for in July, 1917, were found. One complete British division was brought to France from Italy and two more from Palestine. Indian battalions took the place of British battalions in four other divisions in Palestine, and the British battalions so released were used to reconstitute four shattered British divisions in France.

### THE VITAL FRONT.

The Western Front had suddenly become, even in the eyes of the War Cabinet, the vital front, and, be it noted, these measures did not prevent the overthrow of the Turk or the defeat of the Bulgar. Wisdom after the event is better than no wisdom at all, but it is a costly commodity, and we had to buy it at the price of 300,000 casualties within the space of five short weeks—that is, nearly 70,000 more than we suffered in the fourteen weeks of the battle of Passchendaele. We lost 1,000 guns, vast quantities of stores, and were brought to the brink of defeat.

We were saved by Haig's cool leadership, by the stubborn valour of the British soldiery, by the fierce energy with which Foch filled the gap between the British and the French armies, and by Mr. Lloyd George's power of rising to heights in an emergency.

Unfortunately, immediately the first crisis was passed Mr. Lloyd George reverted to his former methods. He had rid himself of Robertson, and he now saw a chance of ridding himself of Haig.

I come now to the events which caused me to intervene.





Position on the Western Front, third week of March, 1918.

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On April 9th, on introducing the measure to extend the age of military service to 51, Mr. Lloyd George stated that our Armies in France were stronger than they had been in the former year, and denied that forces which might have been in France had been kept in the East. Lord Curzon, coached by the Prime Minister, made similar statements simultaneously in the House of Lords.

### FEELING IN FRANCE.

I did not know of these statements at the time when they were made, for the German offensive in Flanders began on April 9th, and I was much too occupied to read speeches. On April 15th I went to France, and I there heard that the Prime Minister's statements on April 9th had aroused great indignation as tending to throw the whole responsibility for failure unfairly upon Haig, at a time when he required all the support, both moral and physical, which the Government could give him.

I promised to go into the matter on my return to London, and on April 20th I procured copies of Hansard, and then for the first time realised how misleading the statements of Ministers were. While I was still considering the best course to take, I read on April 24th a statement made by Mr. Bonar Law in reply to a question in the House that the arrangement for the extension of the front of the Fifth Army before the battle was purely a military one, that is to say that the responsibility for the extension was again Haig's alone.

Simultaneously I learned that a scheme for removing Haig from the supreme command in France was coming rapidly to a head. I had then handed over my work in the War Office to my successor and was awaiting appointment to a command in France. Being free, I went away for a week to the country to think quietly. I say this to show that I acted on no sudden impulse. On April 30th I wrote to the Chief of the Imperial General Staff calling his attention to the incorrect statements of Ministers and to their effect in France. Getting no reply and believing the matter to be one of extreme urgency, I decided to take the grave step of challenging publicly the statement of Ministers.

I had made up my mind that I must act alone, as I could not brief anyone without disclosing confidential information, which I would not do. I therefore communicated with no one even remotely connected with the Press, and the only person in any way connected with politics whom I consulted was Lord Salisbury, to whom I told only what I had heard in France.



## *The Intrigues of the War.*

### JUSTICE OF OUR CAUSE.

I repeat this because it is still said that I was concerned in a political conspiracy. I was concerned to prevent what appeared to me to be action fatal to our cause. I believed the moral strength which the justice of our cause gave us was our chief asset, and that we should impair and even destroy altogether that moral strength if the Government, after refusing throughout the latter half of 1917 to take the steps which the soldiers had urged upon them to meet the German attack, threw the blame for the March disaster upon the soldiers, and then removed Haig. I believed that a public challenge would have the effect of making known to the whole Cabinet the facts as to the strength of our armies in France and in the East, and would stop the attacks upon Haig.

I knew that I was sacrificing a career of some promise and giving up my means of livelihood, but I believed that I was acting rightly, and that if I was right I would not suffer materially. I had no political motive and took no part in the political events which followed my letter to the Press. It would have been easy for me to go to the House of Commons and coach those who were ready to attack Ministers. I stayed in the country.

The statements which I challenged were Mr. Lloyd George's of April 9th that the strength of the Army in 1918 had been more than maintained as compared with 1917, that in Egypt and Palestine there was a very small proportion of British as compared with Indian troops, and Mr. Bonar Law's of April 23rd that the extension of the British front which took place before the battle was an arrangement made solely by the military authorities.

The facts are beyond dispute. The total strength of the Army in France on January 1st, 1917, was 1,299,000, and on January 1st, 1918, was 1,570,000, but in 1918 there were included in the total strength 300,000 unarmed British labourers and Chinese coolies who did not appear in the 1917 figures, while the fighting troops in 1918 were more than 100,000 weaker, and between January 1st and March 21st, when the Germans attacked, Haig had to disband 140 battalions for lack of men to replace the losses we had suffered. In Palestine and Egypt there were at the beginning of March 213,600 white troops and 37,300 native troops. The extension of the front of the Fifth Army was undertaken because of the pressure which M. Clemenceau brought to bear on our Government.

These being the facts, the case against Haig collapsed, though Mr. Lloyd George, handling the facts as a juggler does a pack of cards,

## *The Intrigues of the War.*

won a political triumph. His misstatements were, I believe, in part due to his disposition to interpret facts to suit conclusions already formed, and in part to the organisation with which he had surrounded himself. He had established a special Prime Minister's secretariat in the garden of No. 10, Downing Street, and this department, independent of all other Government departments, had a tendency, natural enough in the circumstances, to look for the information which the Prime Minister required, and to give to the information a colour suited to his views, a process which in military matters was easy, as the department had no one to tell them how to interpret figures supplied by the War Office, or to explain that unarmed Chinese coolies were not a valuable reinforcement for Gough's thin line. The Prime Minister's secretariat made it possible for him to be a dictator, but did not supply him with the means to dictate wisely.

### PREMIER AND STRATEGY.

As I have said in a previous chapter, with Foch at the helm Mr. Lloyd George's influence upon strategy ceased. He was the Prime Minister when victory came, therefore he was the man who won the war. He still, if one may judge from his speeches, believes that his strategy was right and the soldiers' strategy all wrong. If we are ever to be engaged in another world war, which God forbid, it is vital that the facts should be known.

Mr. Lloyd George's strength as a War Minister was his faith in victory and his power of keeping the confidence of the public. His weaknesses were his belief in his military judgment, his power of deceiving himself, his failure to understand that opportunism, sometimes successful in peace, is highly dangerous in war, and, above all, his misconception of the qualities which are required in a leader in war, and his lack of appreciation of the vital importance to a Commander-in-Chief in the field of support from the Government at home. He wanted soldiers quick of wit and clever in council, and had no sense of the importance of character and determination in the field.

He could never bring himself to encourage Haig in the way in which Mr. Asquith encouraged his Commanders-in-Chief. He could never see the need for such a system of bringing the functions of the statesman and soldier into harmony as Mr. Asquith adopted. The consequences were that he missed the chance of victory in 1917, and brought us nearer to defeat in the spring of 1918 than we had ever been, while the final triumph was won by methods which he had previously opposed with all the vigour at his command.



## Appendix

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### SIR FREDERICK MAURICE'S CHALLENGE to MR. LLOYD GEORGE.

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#### The Correspondence.

- I.—MAJOR-GENERAL SIR FREDERICK MAURICE TO MR. LLOYD GEORGE.
- II.—THE DUKE OF NORTHUMBERLAND TO SIR FREDERICK MAURICE.
- III.—MR. LLOYD GEORGE (through his Private Secretary) TO SIR FREDERICK MAURICE.
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#### *I.—Major-General Sir Frederick Maurice to Mr. Lloyd George.*

44, KENSINGTON PARK GARDENS, W.11,  
15 July, 1922.

MY DEAR PRIME MINISTER,

You will recall my letter to you of 5 March, 1920, which I wrote to you after the conclusion of the Peace Conference.

As you did not answer the request which I then made to you to publish the relevant figures, in spite of my declaration that I was prepared to withdraw publicly any accusation I had made against you and to apologise if I was proved to be wrong, I determined to do nothing further in the matter until I was in a position to bring forward complete evidence as to what I knew to be the facts.

[This I am now able to do. The Duke of Northumberland, who was in 1918 the head of one of the sections of the Military Operations Directorate and is fully conversant with certain events which happened

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after I left the War Office, as to which I have not been able hitherto to produce evidence, though I have long been aware of the facts, has told me that he is prepared to allow me to quote his authority.

### **"THE TIME HAS COME."**

In a letter which appeared in the Press on 7 May, 1918, I said :

" On 9 April the Prime Minister said :

" ' What was the position at the beginning of the battle? Notwithstanding the heavy casualties of 1917, the Army in France was considerably stronger on the 1st January, 1918, than on the 1st January, 1917.' "

" That implies that Sir Douglas Haig's fighting strength on the eve of the great battle which began on 21 March had not been diminished. That is not correct."

On 9 May, in the House of Commons, in commenting on that statement, you said :

" If there was anything wrong in the figures, I got them from official sources for which General Maurice is responsible, and I think he might have said that when he impugned the honour of a Minister."

**The statement that I had publicly challenged the correctness of figures which I had supplied to you reflects both upon my honour and my sanity.**

**I have waited patiently for the time to come for me to challenge that statement, and the time has now come.**

The facts are that in January, 1918, when there was still time to apply remedies, my Department warned Ministers of the danger which our diminishing strength on the Western front constituted. On 9 April you made the statement I have quoted above. On 9 May, in defending that statement, you said :

" When you talk about fighting strength, who are the combatants and who are the non-combatants? (An Hon. Member : ' Oh ! ' ) I am going to take the non-combatants as well, and my hon. friend need not be afraid that I am going to shirk it. Let me first of all deal with the question—Who are the combatants? Are those men who stopped the advance of the German Army to Amiens the other day combatants? (Hon. Members : ' Yes.' ) They are not if you begin to make a distinction between combatants and non-combatants. I am speaking of General Carey's force—they would not be treated as combatants."

Now I have before me the composition of Carey's force, and all the men in that force, with the possible exception of a few stragglers, were included in the fighting strength of our armies in France, which, as the returns at your disposal at the time when you spoke showed, had been diminished on 1 January, 1918, as compared with 1 January, 1917.



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### FIGHTING STRENGTH DIMINISHED.

You made that statement because these same returns showed that, though the fighting strength had been diminished, the non-fighting strength had been increased by 410,897, of whom 190,197 were unarmed British labourers and 108,203 unarmed native labourers, and you wished to prove that the non-fighting strength was available for fighting.

In your speech of 9 May you went on :

“ But I will leave that. Take the ordinary technical distinction between combatants and non-combatants.”

You then quoted a note which had been prepared in the Directorate of Military Operations in reply to a question put by Sir Godfrey Baring on 18 April as justifying your statement of 9 April, *i.e.*, nine days before.

That note, which you read to the House, ran :

“ From the statement included it will be seen that the combatant strength of the British Army was greater on 1 January, 1918, than on 1 January, 1917.”

On this you based the assertion that I had supplied you with the figures from which you made your statement of 9 April, and on 9 May you said :

“ The figures which I gave were taken from the official records of the War Office, which I sent for before I made the statement. If they were inaccurate, General Maurice was as responsible as anyone else. They were not inaccurate.”

You said that when you had at your disposal returns showing the diminution of the fighting strength of the Army in France on 1 January, 1918, as compared with 1 January, 1917.

### MISTAKE IN AN ANSWER.

Now the facts with regard to the answer given to Sir Godfrey Baring on 18 April are :

- (1) My successor as Director of Military Operations arrived in the War Office on 11 April. On Sunday, the 14th, I went to France with Lord Milner, and returned to London late on 17 April. On the 18th, the day the answer was given, I was engaged in formally handing over to my successor, and I knew nothing either of the question or of the answer until I read your speech of 9 May.
- (2) I have since learned, and this the Duke of Northumberland is ready to confirm, that the answer was required in a hurry by Mr. Macpherson, then Parliamentary Secretary at the War Office.

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In the hurry a mistake was made in the answer, and the whole strength of our Army in Italy was included in the strength of our Armies in France. With the addition of all these troops, a slight increase of the fighting strength on 1 January, 1918, as compared with 1 January, 1917, was shown, and the note which you read was drafted accordingly.

The mistake was discovered shortly afterwards, and was reported to your principal private secretary, Mr. Philip Kerr, and later to Mr. Macpherson.

The fact is, then, that you used on 9 May an accidentally incorrect return made on 18 April to justify what you said on 9 April, though you had at your disposal a return showing that the note of 18 April was incorrect. You will, I understand, find records of all this in the War Office.

Now I am quite prepared to believe that, in the hurry of preparing your speech on 9 May, you did not verify all the facts : that you were not aware that Carey's force was almost wholly composed of combatants, and that you were not informed of the circumstances which led to the answer given on 18 April to Sir Godfrey Baring. If that is so, the hurry was due to the fact that you decided to refuse the inquiry for which I asked, and to make an *ex parte* statement to the House.

### DEMAND FOR WITHDRAWAL.

You now know that you made a serious charge against me on incorrect information, and I know that the House of Commons was greatly influenced by your statement that I had supplied you with the information which you used.

I must, therefore, ask you to be good enough to write me a letter saying that you now find that the information which you used on 9 May was incorrect, and that you unreservedly withdraw the imputation that I had supplied you with information the correctness of which I afterwards publicly challenged.

Would you kindly let me have such a letter by 24 July? Failing such a reply, the only course left to me, in order to clear my reputation, is to send this letter to the Press.

I am,

Yours very truly,

F. MAURICE.



*II.—The Duke of Northumberland  
to Sir Frederick Maurice.*

17, PRINCE'S GATE, S.W.7.

MY DEAR GENERAL,

The Prime Minister's conduct in making his statement on 9 May and in declining to withdraw the imputation that you have supplied him with incorrect information is the more outrageous in that the Military Operations Directorate had repeatedly drawn his attention to the decline of the fighting strength of the Allies in France, and to the steady increase of the enemy's forces on the Western Front. These figures were continually challenged by Mr. Lloyd George, who insisted that the Allied strength was greater than was represented. The figures showing the increase of the German forces in the months preceding the great attack of 21 March were given weekly in the Summary of Operations circulated to Ministers, and in the same document during the same period the decline in our fighting strength was more than once stressed.

The Prime Minister knew the figures sent in by the Operations Directorate, and with this knowledge fresh in his mind made the utterly false statement of 9 April, and one month later actually pretended that if a too favourable estimate had been given, the fault lay with the Military Operations Directorate, whose warnings he had consistently disregarded.

Yours sincerely,

(Signed) NORTHUMBERLAND,

MAJOR-GENERAL SIR F. MAURICE,

*III.—Mr. Lloyd George (through his Private Secretary) to Sir Frederick Maurice.*

10, DOWNING STREET,  
WHITEHALL, S.W.1,  
21 July, 1922.

DEAR SIR FREDERICK MAURICE,

The Prime Minister has received your letter of the 15th and directs me to acknowledge it.

What he said in 1918, he said in good faith upon the information supplied to him ; and he does not think it will be injurious to the public interest or unjust to you if he leaves your criticism, like much more of the same character, to the unprejudiced judgment of posterity.

As regards your threat to publish, he would refer you with all courtesy for answer to a short observation made in similar circumstances by the Duke of Wellington.\*

I am,

Yours very truly,

(Signed) E. W. M. GRIGG.

MAJOR-GENERAL SIR FREDERICK MAURICE, K.C.M.G., C.B.  
44, KENSINGTON PARK GARDENS, W.11.

\* Mr. Lloyd George apparently refers to the observation made by the Duke of Wellington  
"Dear Fanny,—Peach and be D——d!"



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